

## Re-vitalizing the Status Quo

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Any number of authors over the past few years have been alternately predicting or advocating (sometimes both) the death of cataloging, cataloging data, the current storage structure (MARC format), and the catalog. I believe this to be a simply deplorable idea. We should not be considering ending or curtailing cataloging, but rather we should be re-investing in the production of cataloging data and also exerting real control over the service it provides structure to - - the catalog.

In a very recent short article (1), Brad Eden categorized cataloging as a sinking boat that we can't continue to fund. He admits that the library catalog is of value and that structured metadata is of importance as well. He then states that "the reality from an administrative point of view is that libraries have limited resources with which to compete and position ourselves in the new information universe." (Apparently, administrative realities are the kinds that ignore items of value and importance.) He later makes two incredible statements: "*Our infatuation with order, perfection, and control does not work in today's information environment,*" and "*'Good enough' is just fine for today's users.*"

Reliable cataloging records are not a symptom of "infatuation" - - a trivializing term. Reliable records are the result of a long-standing commitment to provide service to our patrons. Rather than providing less quality, we need to provide more. (Believe me, very few practicing catalogers believe in perfection. We are committed to quality, though.) Better and more detailed records are the foundation upon which user

friendly and comprehensive search mechanisms can be built. You simply cannot - - as he and others have suggested - - build a catalog based on WorldCat Local (WCL) while also providing lower quality information for WCL. (Ignoring for now whether WCL qualifies as a catalog.)

"*Good enough*" is just fine for today's users." This is nothing more than a rallying cry for mediocrity. Most libraries exist within a larger structure. For academic libraries, that is the academic world. Imagine recruiting students to a university based on that slogan. We are also places of employment. Imagine trying to hire librarians and staff to work at an organization based on good enough is just fine. As a mental exercise, transfer that motto to the instruction of the sciences, engineering, or languages. It would be an embarrassment there; it is one in librarianship.

Eden and others have decided that, "*We can't keep funding something that today's users aren't accessing*". But of course we can, especially if, as he admits, it is of value and importance. Our mission requires it, so our goal should be to make it more used and usable and to help our patrons understand the value and importance of the tools we provide. If, as he states, the catalog is used by only 10% of our "customers" (they aren't customers, but that's a different day's debate), then we need to work to change that. Without data and structure, everything is not only miscellaneous, it's hidden, unknown, forgotten, and irretrievable; in effect, it is lost.

## Commitments to Quality and Service

Eden calls for an integration of new business models that leverage the one master bibliographic record. He leaves un-addressed the requirement

that someone provide at least the one record, but more importantly he ignores the reason that multiple local records do exist - - one record doesn't always serve all needs. It's not infatuation that causes modifications; it's a commitment to service to our patrons.

In many discussions of cataloging, the nearly sacrosanct (and undefined) business model is marched out as underlying principle to drastically cut or disband catalog departments. Here's what I know: there are more publications now than there have ever been before; there are more resources in a more dynamic and complex environment than there have ever been before. So the proper business response is not to dedicate fewer resources to their management and organization. To do so hinders our success in fulfilling our mission and it hurts our patrons. The proper response is that we should, in the face of this environment, re-vitalize our commitment to the status quo - - we need to provide better data, share it more easily, and take control of our library systems (as some are starting to do). If we fail to do so, we will, in the long run, prove ourselves unable to provide meaningful contributions to our parent organizations, whether that's the city, the state, the county, or the university. Our survival is based on our commitments to quality and service. Let's re-energize those.

**(1) Eden. Bradford Lee.**  
"Ending the Status Quo."  
*American Libraries*; Mar 2008  
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